

# INTERVIEW WITH ELEANOR GREENLEE

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John Conger

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## ABSTRACTS

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### English

The following is an interview done by trainer John Conger of his mentor, IIBA trainer emerita Eleanor Greenlee from Northern California, USA. She speaks very simply of the value of staying grounded and present in her role as therapist. Eleanor says the goal is to, “Feel yourself and be present, see the other person and what they experience. If you are present with them, they tell you everything.”

### Interview mit Eleanor Greenlee (German)

Das folgende Interview hat der Trainer John Conger mit seiner Mentorin, der in nordkalifornien beheimateten, emeritierten internationalen IIBA-Trainerin Eleanor Greenlee, geführt. In einfachen Worten spricht sie darin über die Bedeutung, die es für sie hat, in ihrer Rolle als Therapeutin gegroundet und jederzeit präsent zu bleiben. Das Ziel ist, sagt Eleanor: „Nimm Dich selbst achtsam wahr – und nehme die andere Person und ihre Erlebensweise wahr. Wenn Du anderen Personen ein achtsames Gegenüber bist, werden sie Dir alles mitteilen.“

### Interview d’Eleanor Greenlee (French)

L’article qui suit est un interview realise par John Conger, formateur de l’IIBA, aupres de son mentor, Eleanor Greenlee, formatrice emerite de l’IIBA vivant en Californie du nord. Celle-ci parle en toute simplicité de l’importance de demeurer enracinee et presente dans son role de therapeute. Eleanor dit

que le but, c'est «de sentir ce qui se passe en soi, d'être présent, de voir l'autre personne et ce qu'elle vit. Car si vous êtes présent avec eux (les clients), ils vous diront tout».

## Entrevista con Eleanor Greenlee (Spanish)

La siguiente entrevista la realizó el entrenador John Congrio con su mentor, la entrenadora emerita de IIBA, Eleanor Greenlee del norte de California de los Estados Unidos. Ella habla de una manera muy sencilla del valor que tiene el estar arraigada y presente en su papel como terapeuta. Eleanor dice que dicha meta consiste en “sentirse a uno mismo y estar presente, ver a la otra persona y lo que experimenta. Si usted está presente con ellos, le cuentan todo.”

## Intervista ad Eleonor Greenlee (Italian)

Quella che segue è un'intervista fatta dal trainer John Conger alla sua mentore, la trainer emerita dell'IIBA, Eleanor Greenlee della California del Nord, USA. Eleanor parla con semplicità del valore di essere radicata e presente nel suo ruolo di terapeuta. Sostiene che l'obiettivo è “sentirsi ed essere presente, vedere le persone e quello che sperimentano. Se siete presenti con loro, vi diranno tutto”.

## Entrevista com Eleanor Greenlee (Portuguese)

O que aqui se segue é uma entrevista feita pelo trainer John Conger com sua mentora, a trainer emerita do IIBA Eleanor Greenlee da California do Norte, Estados Unidos. Ela fala com simplicidade do valor de permanecer grounded e presente em seu papel de terapeuta. Eleanor diz que o objetivo é „sentir que voce está presente, ver a outra pessoa e o que ambos experienciam. Se voce está presente com eles, eles lhe contam tudo”.

## PROLOGUE

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Many years ago, (1978–82) Eleanor Greenlee was my therapist. I had been through a few years of Reichian therapy, which was not always a good fit. Of course I learned from the work, but did not feel encouraged by the constrictions it represented at that time. In 1978, I ran into Michael Conant and Eleanor Greenlee who, while pitching a training program, assured me that in Bioenergetics, we talk too. I had, during the “golden age” of Northern California Bioenergetics, exposure to the brilliant best of the trainers, but for me Eleanor Greenlee had a style that most suited my own disposition.

Over the years, my work and thought has matured around basic principles like the therapist, first and foremost, being present and grounded in my body as the basis for reading, moment by moment, the subtle shifts and the deep drift of the energetic current occurring between each client and ourselves. I teach that our evolutionary bodies were talking up a storm long before the gene for speech, *Foxp2*, showed up about 120 thousand years ago. I teach my students to listen and to talk in those languages prior to verbal speech. Often enough, our client's body chats or grieves or trembles, as childhood drama seeks a better balance.

Looking back, I do feel proud about exercises I have brought forth and my emphasis on listening somatically as a training focus. But I find myself laughing, because I have been putting words to the basic style and principles that Eleanor instilled in me by her approach and presence--no fancy words about something, but her flawless awareness of the moment's interplay, her unflinching modesty and love that awakened and touched my work.

I studied with the best and have been blessed by her professional passion for Bioenergetics. Eleanor has taught all over the world, year after year, because she has always been a great teacher and human being. Nevertheless, Eleanor has retired finally to her garden and her friends. Only a few weeks ago, I visited her and our talk magically became an interview. I spontaneously and with some delight wrote down our conversation as it happened. I feel happy to express my gratitude to a woman who changed the direction of my life.

## INTERVIEW

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J: What do you consider most fundamental to your practice of Bioenergetics? Has either character structure, reading energy or relationship, for instance, been dominant?

E: To me the most important concern for the therapist is to feel yourself and be present, seeing the other person and what they express. If you are present with them, they tell you everything. Some people follow a formula rather than following the flow, the experience.

J: When you say formula, are you referring to character styles?

E: Yes.

J: When is it appropriate to teach character structure?

E: Probably in the second or third year, but not year one, because you blind people to the language of the body.

J: So how was Al Lowen about character structure?

E: I think he recognized, he knew that his basic approach was too hard for everyone. They needed a list, a formula. But at the same time, I learned so much that I know from Al about the language of the body. He was methodical, but always present, and always reading the body. He would say, "Not what people say, but what they do."

J: So your preference first and foremost is to teach the language of the body before teaching character structure?

E: Absolutely. It's a terrible mistake to teach character before the second or third year. If you tell the client that the left shoulder is higher than the right, they don't feel seen for who they are. They need to feel seen first. I am not sure where I learned this approach first. Earl Cramer was my first teacher and he was present and made me feel that who I am was important, not character structure. Then it was Al Lowen who taught me. Cramer was a very sensitive, caring man. You two are alike. You both put feelings first and everything else is second. When people get angry, some people react rather than see the pain underneath the anger.

J: What did you like best about Al Lowen?

E: Well, he had some personality difficulties, but he was a master at reading the language of the body. He was able to read like no one I have ever seen. When he wrote that book, he wrote it from his heart. He knew exactly what he was talking about. In a strange way, I loved and respected him for what he built and how he searched for answers. That book, *The Language of the Body*, was the greatest book of them all.

J: I would like to ask you some questions about yourself. For instance, in what countries have you taught Bioenergetics?

E: All over Europe, New Zealand, the US and Canada. I would go any place people wanted me to go. My fear was that they would want a “technical” experience. I gave them something else. Instead, I was a reader of the body. Al thought to be a public figure, you had to be a certain way, and I wasn’t like that. But then he was the master of the language of the body.

J: What else do you want to say?

E: I have been trained in other forms of therapy but Bioenergetics is the one that reaches the heart. It touches people and they feel seen. People say to me, “you see me.” It is the secret of contact. It embarrasses and shames them but not in a bad way, but moves them sometimes to tears, rather than defensively. I’m so glad you write. I like who I am coming from, my position. I feel like I have to watch what I say, that it is important what I say.

J: Working in different cultures, were there any cultural differences that showed up in your work?

E: Bioenergetics gets underneath the skin when you meet each person. The rest doesn’t matter because they feel seen and heard and touched.

J: I would like to ask you some questions about your early life. Where were you brought up?

E: All over, but Astoria, Long Island was the primary place. I didn’t have a place. My family was broken up as a young child. I pretty much had to take care of myself. People loved me though.

J: Who was your favorite person?

E: My aunt Estelle, my mother’s sister, who was strange. Most people didn’t appreciate her. She was an alcoholic and divorced. But she would hold me in her lap. She had a great capacity to love. She had a hard life and she knew how to love.

J: How old were you then?

E: She was the first person that loved me. My mother was in pain and beaten, with values she couldn’t live up to. My Aunt Estelle was someone who could sit with you as if no one else was important. I was on some level her child. She couldn’t have her own child. People didn’t like her because she drank and had boyfriends.

J: It sounds like she became your model for how you work with people.

E: Yes, I think you are right. I experienced her just as you said. She loved me and cared about me very much. I felt like my Aunt was my mother.

J: Where were you at 18, beginning your adulthood?

E: I was graduating High School in New York City where I was raised, but all over.

J: Who was raising you?

E: Never one person. My mother was a beautiful woman and for her, the most important thing was to be beautiful, but my Aunt Estelle was my mother. I always felt so safe with her. My mother who was more stable and secure was not my “mother”, although I know my mother loved me. Well you know when you get around your children, something happens, the presence of love. Your heart is so filled with love for them. I learned it from Aunt Estelle. She was the youngest of the two sisters. My mother was pragmatic and had a job. She got married and had a child.

J: What job did she have?

E: Primarily she was a waitress in restaurants. She wanted to be a good mother but she didn't love like her sister.

J: Tell me about your father.

E: Joe Grippi, the best father. My father loved me a great deal but he had a life of his own, not like he slighted me ever. He was so delighted on the phone whenever I called. He took care of me when my mother and father broke up. My dad was a very traditional Italian man, a ladies man, but I was always his daughter. When I came by, there was always a twinkle in his eye. He was a sweet Italian man.

J: What did you do at 18 years of age?

E: I was scared and frightened. I didn't know what to do, but I had a sense of myself. I knew I was a survivor. Aunt Estelle carried me through my childhood.

J: What did you do when you got out of High School?

E: I met Robert, the love of my life. I met him dancing. I loved to dance since I was 16 when my mother took me to a Polish dance place.

J: Your mother was Polish?

E: Yes my mother was Polish. I used to speak Polish. I spent summers in Pennsylvania with my Aunt Josephine and my Uncle Louie. My uncle Louie was very gruff but he taught me how to fish. He showed me how to bait the hook, catch the fish, kill it, cook it and eat it.

J: I get the feeling his own children didn't want to do all that?

E: Oh yes, they didn't want to fish at all! My grandmother was Polish and German and only spoke Polish. I went to church with her each week, a Polish church. My mother's parents were raised in Europe. My grandfather was a brilliant, educated man. When he came to this country, he opened up a shoemakers shop. He was always so grateful to be here, because the Germans took over Poland and he was glad to get out. He was a very loving man. That's where my aunt Estelle got it from, her loving nature.

J: When did your grandfather die?

E: I was there, a great loss. I was 13. My grandparents had a house in Pennsylvania, and the grandparents lived on one side, and my aunt and uncle on the other side of the house. My grandfather spoke English. They got out of Poland just in time before the war got worse, with their life.

J: Were they Jewish?

E: I don't know. They were Catholic. Hitler was just incarcerating all sorts of people and making them work in his factories. My grandfather was very well educated. I remember him with shoe polish all over his body and clothes and he talked like a professor. We would sometimes put together a box of clothes

to send to my father's sister and we would sew it shut. I met Robert dancing at Loreleis. We lived in Astoria, Long Island and Lorelies was on 86th street in the City. My mother took me there, but then she allowed me to go on my own. My mother loved dancing too. I met Robert there. We fell in love. He was a sailor on board ship, an aircraft carrier. He told me that he asked one of his friends where to go to meet nice ladies and they said the Lorelie.

He was unusual there, a sailor in uniform. He asked me to dance and after that, I never danced with anyone else. He was always there beside me. He was such a superb dancer, people would move aside when we danced. I was good too.

J: When did you get married?

E: In 1952.

J: Then what happened?

E: He got shipped to California. I got on a train to California. That was considered very bold and dangerous then for me to travel alone. We didn't make love until the night we got married. We got married before we went to California. Then he got relocated. We lived in Oakland. He went overseas. I got a job. Then we bought this house in Walnut Creek. He went to Cal and became an architect, his dream, and we had children. We married in 1952 and divorced in 1956. Then I went to school and became independent. It was cloudy times. I was shocked and naive. I had a house and children. I was shocked that Robert was fooling around. I got into therapy and went to school. It was a very painful time. I was Catholic and thought that was it, marriage and family. I couldn't handle it. I got in touch with myself. I went on to be a therapist.

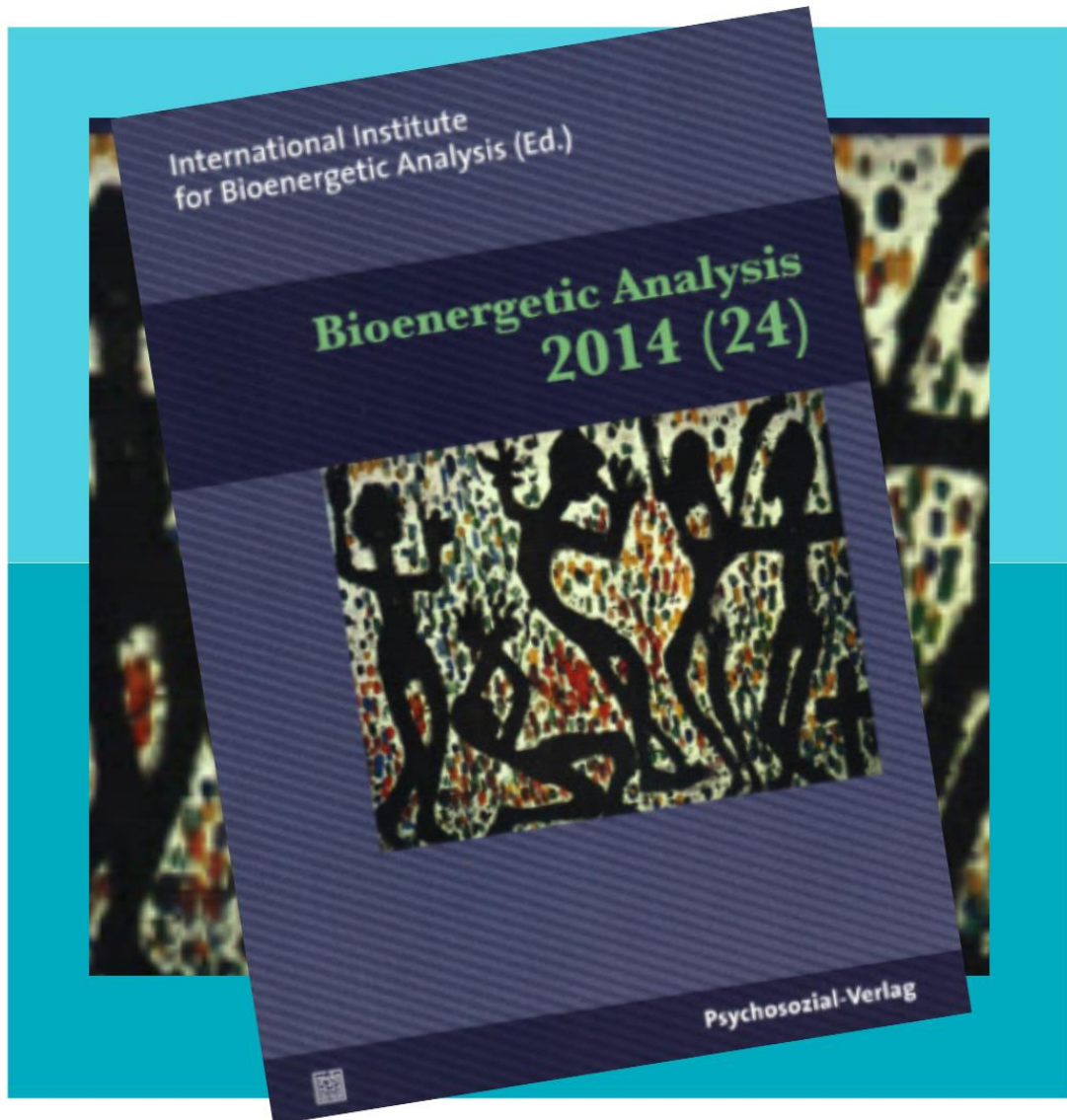
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Conger, a psychologist and psychoanalyst, is also an international trainer in Bioenergetic Analysis. He is the author of (1988, 2004) *Jung and Reich, the Body as Shadow* and (1994) *the Body in Recovery, Somatic Psychotherapy and the Self*. Dr. Conger teaches at the California Institute of Integral Studies and Meridian University, and conducts his own training in analytic and somatic practice. He has a private practice in Berkeley, Ca., USA.

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Its purpose is to further elaborate theoretical and scientific concepts and to make links to enhance communication and broaden our connection with other schools of therapy, as well as with academic psychology, medicine, and other psychosomatic schools of thought. The journal publishes reports on empirical research, theoretical papers, and case studies.

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The International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis (IIBA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the spread of Bioenergetic Analysis in the world and to the support and encouragement of its members in their work as Bioenergetic Therapists.

The IIBA was founded by Alexander Lowen, M.D. Registered in the Register of Associations of the Government of Catalonia (Spain): 44520. Spanish Vat-Number: G65432429.

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